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SUBJECT: EXCLUDED FROM ELECTORAL COMMISSION, IBK'S
POLITICAL ISOLATION DEEPENS

REF: BAMAKO 001031

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(C) Summary: With the 2007 presidential elections now less than six months away, President Amadou Toumani Toure's (ATT) allies in the National Assembly and the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) have maneuvered to further isolate National Assembly leader and presumed presidential challenger Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (IBK). On October 5 a broad coalition of political parties entitled "Friends of ATT" ignored IBK's plea to avoid the "demons of division" and excluded IBK's Rally for Mali (RPM) for the second year in a row from the National Assembly's 18 rotating leadership positions, leaving IBK with just the Presidency of the National Assembly - a five year position that was not up for renewal. This followed the RPM's September 27 exclusion from the CENI due to a dispute with two parties, the Movement for Renewal (MPR) and the National Committee for Democratic Initiatives (CNID), formerly allied with IBK but now supporting ATT. Although the RPM has attributed the setbacks in the Assembly and the CENI to illegal actions by ATT and his allies, IBK appears to be more a victim of shrewd politics and his own inability to forge political alliances. End Summary.

National Assembly Moves to Further Isolate IBK

2.(U) During an unexpectedly conciliatory speech to open the new National Assembly session on October 2, National Assembly President IBK urged his fellow Deputies to overcome the "demons of division" and elect new Assembly officers based on consensus rather than partisan politics. In October 2005 the RPM refused to accept two officer posts in place of the four it had demanded, thereby ending up with no positions in last year's Assembly executive office. This year, members of a new coalition of Deputies known as the "Friends of ATT" didn't even bother to consult with their RPM colleagues. Mustering an overwhelming majority, the Friends of ATT simply renewed, for the first time in Assembly history, the annual mandates of the outgoing 18 officers. As a result, once again none of the Assembly's 8 vice-presidents, 8 secretaries and 2 administrative officer posts were allocated to the RPM.

3.(U) Although the RPM holds more seats than any other party in the 147 seat Assembly, without any significant political alliances the 41 RPM Deputies could do nothing more than stage a ceremonial boycott of the vote. Outside the Assembly building an RPM spokesman read a statement condemning rival Deputies for failing to even inform the RPM of their intentions. "Voting to return the outgoing executive office," declared the RPM's statement, "defied all of the Assembly's democratic procedures" and violated internal

regulations stipulating that the Assembly's office "reflect the configuration of parliament."

4.(C) IBK's remarkably moderate October 2 speech to open the new Assembly session appeared to many as an attempt to re-build political bridges. Judging from the allocation of Assembly officers, IBK's speech failed to yield any new alliances and his political capital within the Assembly may have reached an all-time low. With colleagues from rival parties eager to show their support for ATT, IBK may have succeeded only in deflating many of his own supporters who had anticipated a full-blown campaign speech attacking ATT.

RPM Challenges Exclusion From Electoral Commission

5.(C) In another setback for IBK, the Ministry of Territorial Administration left the RPM off of the 15 member National Independent Electoral Commission announced September 127. The RPM immediately challenged the decision, declaring that Minister of Territorial Administration Kafougouna Kone's failure to include the RPM was not "an isolated act" and "revealed a clearly expressed willingness to exclude certain actors from the electoral process." According to the RPM, Minister Kone's decision "placed in doubt the sincerity and transparency of the coming elections and endangered the stability of the country."

6.(C) Normally the CENI is composed of 5 members of the majority party, 5 members of the political opposition and 5 representatives from civil society. Since there is no official opposition party in Mali and alliances between major

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parties remain in flux, political leaders agreed to base the composition of this year's CENI on the political alliances that existed during the 2002 presidential election. The new CENI consequently consists of 2 representatives from each of the three main political coalitions circa 2002, plus 2 spots for political independents, one space for the Union for the Republic and Democracy (URD), one space for a largely insignificant group that styles itself as an "opposition" party, and 5 seats for civil society.

7.(C) Although IBK and the RPM agreed to this structure, the coalition known as "Hope 2002" to which they belonged five years ago has since disintegrated. As Hope 2002's former president, IBK apparently assumed he would be able to ensure that the coalition selected two individuals from the RPM as its CENI nominees. But Hope 2002's two other key members, the MPR and CNID, refused to play along. The MPR is led by ATT's Minister of Trade Choguel Maiga. The CNID's president is Mountaga Tall, the 1st vice-president of the National Assembly. Maiga and Tall have endorsed ATT's 2006 re-election bid. With both the RPM and the MPR-CNID claiming to represent Hope 2002, each faction submitted its own list of nominees for the coalition's two seats on the CENI. Rather than split the difference and take one from each list, Minister of Territorial Administration Kone discarded the RPM's nominations and named the MPR-CNID nominees to the electoral commission.

8.(C) In response, on October 10 the RPM asked the Malian Supreme Court to strike down the presidential decree naming the members of the Independent Electoral Commission. Convinced that Minister Kone violated Mali's electoral law by discarding the list of nominees submitted by IBK in his role as president of Hope 2002, the RPM's communications director stated: "We are going to challenge and obtain the CENI's annulment." "An incomplete CENI," explained another RPM leader, "is worthless. It is not Kafougouna Kone's place to delve into the management of political coalitions. That he did this constitutes a misuse of excessive power. He overstepped his authority."

9.(C) A few hours after the RPM lodged its complaint with the Supreme Court, the leaders of the MPR and CNID released a lengthy statement commending Minister Kone's management of the situation and condemning IBK for "posing once again as a victim." After accusing IBK of trying to set the stage for an eventual protest of the 2007 electoral results, the statement concluded by offering the MPR-CNID's two CENI seats to the RPM in order to "preserve" peace and stability. It remains unclear whether the RPM will accept the two CENI positions apparently vacated by the MPR-CNID or pursue the annulment of the entire CENI before the Supreme Court. On October 15 the RPM's communication's director linked the events surrounding the composition of the CENI to the officer elections within the National Assembly and said the RPM would not drop its case before the Supreme Court. "We are attacking a decree," said RPM communications director and National Assembly Deputy Boubacar Traore. "If this decree is annulled, there is no CENI. There will then be a new decree that will create and designate new CENI representatives."

Comment

10.(C) By closing the RPM out of both the National Assembly's executive bureau and the CENI, ATT further increased IBK's political isolation. IBK's complaint that the electoral deck is stacked against him has some credence, but is largely attributable, not to misdeeds by ATT, but shrewd presidential politics and IBK's own miscalculations. With only 41 out of 147 seats in the National Assembly and its previous political alliances crumbling, the RPM's failure to win leadership posts within the Assembly is unsurprising. ATT, on the other hand, has proved remarkably adept at lining up coalitions of diverse political groupings to out-flank IBK at nearly every turn. IBK's assumption that the members of the long defunct Hope 2002 alliance would support his chosen nominees for the CENI is particularly hard to fathom given that the political sentiments of MPR and CNID leaders Choguel Maiga and Mountaga Tall were well known in advance. By submitting their own list of CENI nominees, Maiga and Tall succeeded in throwing IBK further off balance. The MPR-CNID's allegations that the RPM is trolling for a legal justification to support claims of electoral malfeasance should be taken seriously, however. As reported previously (reftel), it appears increasingly likely that IBK will play the fraud card, whether warranted or not, should the 2007 election not go his way.

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